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THE
IMPORTANCE

1608/273.

OF

A PROPER CHOICE OF COMPANY.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE TRON CHURCH OF EDINBURGH,

ON THE TWENTY-SECOND DAY OF MAY M.DCC.XCI.

BY THE REVEREND JOHN JOHNSTONE.

MINISTER AT CROSSMICHAEL.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY IN SCOTLAND FOR PROMOTING RELIGIOUS
KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE POOR.

Anno 1791.



EDINBURGH, 7th June 1791.

AT a General Meeting of the Society in Scotland for promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor;

RESOLVED,

THAT the Thanks of this Society be given to the Rev. Mr. John Johnstone for his excellent Sermon, preached at their desire; and that he be requested to allow the same to be printed for the benefit of the Society,

HORATIUS CANNAN, Sec.

TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
DAVID EARL OF LEVEN AND MELVILLE,
PRESIDENT
OF THE
SOCIETY IN SCOTLAND
FOR PROMOTING RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE AMONG
THE POOR.

THE FOLLOWING SERMON

IS
RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY
HIS LORDSHIP'S

MOST OBEYANT, AND MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.



A SERMON.

PSALM CXIX. 63.

I AM A COMPANION OF ALL THEM THAT FEAR THEE,
AND OF THEM THAT KEEP THY PRECEPTS.

SOCIETY is necessary to the existence, to the improvement, and to the comfort of man. His helplessness in infancy and in old age; the languor that seizes him when he is too much alone; the vehemence with which he desires, and the joy with which he continues to possess a companion, or a friend, clearly prove him to be a social being. Besides, wherever men have been found, they have been found united. The family exists even in the savage state. The affection of the parent binds him to his offspring. The dependence of their situation, and gratitude for favours received, lead them in return to respect those through whom they have been brought into life. In every stage of their progress from

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rudeness to refinement, men have common objects of pursuit, and are engaged in operations, in which, without mutual aid, they cannot be successful. Civil and political conventions are formed.

Nor is it merely to promote his advantage in this world, that a disposition to society so peculiarly strong, hath been implanted by his Maker, in the heart of man. On the direction which this disposition receives, depends in a great measure the moral and religious character which he is found to exhibit. More depends on a proper choice of company, than many at first are disposed to allow. It is true, that religion is a personal thing; that it is between God and the soul; and that it belongs not to our brethren, but to the power and influence of grace, to enlighten the understanding; to renew and sanctify the heart. Still, however, it is to be remembered, that under the divine administration, ends are produced by the intervention of means; and that therefore, if we are solicitous to secure the end of our faith, we must be diligent in the use of those means of salvation which the word of God, and the experience of his servants, have proven to be effectual.



The Psalmist David well knew the corrupting influence of bad company; and he testified his sense of it, when with solemnity and earnestness, he said to his Son, "Enter not into the paths of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and go away." His own obedience of such precepts as these, was a proof of the excellence of his character, and one of the means, by which, under God, that excellence was attained. In the 26th Psalm, having appealed to the Lord as the judge of his integrity, and having declared that he had "walked in his truth," he adds, ver. 4, 5. "I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and I will not sit with the wicked." To the same purpose he expressed himself in the division of the 119th Psalm, of which our text is a part. He had made choice of God to be his portion: Firm resolutions of obedience were formed. Conscious of his inability to reduce these to practice, he implored direction and aid from above: His former conduct was reviewed; and his repentance was accompanied with "the fruits that were meet for it." Devotion towards God,

and fellowship with him, became the chief object of his love and attention:—And, that nothing might be wanting to complete, and to preserve the consistency and the worth of his character, he added, “ I am a companion of all
“ them that fear thee, and of them that keep
“ thy precepts.”

The subject which this text introduces, certainly accords with the design for which we are assembled.—While in a humble dependence on divine grace, I endeavour to inculcate on my hearers, and especially on the younger part of them, a steady imitation of the Psalmist's example, I may consider myself as in some measure a fellow-worker with those, who have invited me to address you ; of those who have associated themselves for the laudable purpose of promoting among the poor, the knowledge and the practice of our holy religion.—That a proper choice of company is one of the most powerful means of improvement, will, it is hoped, be made to appear, when we have considered its influence, on our Principles, on our Conduct, and on our Enjoyment.

First, then, We recommend a proper choice of company, from its influence on our Principles.

Man is fitted for the study and perception of truth. His curiosity prompts him to use the means of information; and his industry, when it receives a proper direction, is rewarded by the pleasure which he feels on every addition to his knowledge. Fallen however, and fallible by nature, he is in danger of being led into error, by inattention or prejudice; by an affectation of singularity; by a love of system; or, by an implicit submission to the dictates of human authority.

To counteract these and other causes of error, to prevent or to remove their pernicious effects, is the work which philosophy undertakes, but which religion only hath power to accomplish. While superstition and enthusiasm flatter the senses, or agitate the affections of men, that "wisdom which cometh from above," uniformly treats them as reasonable beings. She teaches them to value, ~~and~~ enables them to attain an enlightened understanding. It hath sometimes been said, that if our conduct be good, it is a matter of indifference what creed we adopt, or of what religious society we are

members. But do not the scriptures insist on the necessity of faith, as that without which we cannot please God, or be justified in his sight? Do not the scriptures profess to regulate our opinions of God; of his perfections and providence; of the method of worshipping him acceptably through a mediator; and of the channel in which his mercy flows to those, whose consciences convince them of sin? Is not Jesus Christ represented as an object of faith? Are not his obedience and atonement the grounds of our acceptance with the father? Is not his grace subservient to our improvement in knowledge, in holiness, and in comfort? Are not his promises the foundation of our hope in God, as the rewarder of them that diligently seek him?

But, it may perhaps be inquired, “ what connexion hath all this with the subject announced in the text? Is not the investigation of truth the act of the individual? Is it not by searching the scriptures in his solitary hours, that he may hope to obtain an accurate knowledge of the objects of faith, and of the reasons by which he may justify the hope that is in him? Is it not when he hath entered into his closet, and shut the door, that he is to come with

“ boldness to the throne of grace, and to pray
 “ for the spirit to guide him into all truth ?

Yes, brethren, it is by the blessing of heaven on such means as these, that we are to be
 “ translated out of darkness into marvellous
 “ light.” But these supersede not the necessity of other means of improvement. You must not expect that your principles shall long be unshaken, if you mingle too freely with the ungodly and profane.

Perhaps, you have had the benefit of a liberal and religious education : Your parents have remembered their solemn vow, and have been careful to “ bring you up in the nurture and
 “ admonition of the Lord :” They have spoken to you of the “ things which concern your
 “ peace,” and have endeavoured to fix in your minds, those principles which support and govern their own : You have been accustomed to regard the Almighty, as the hearer of the prayers of those that “ seek him early,” and as pleased with the praises of “ sucklings and of babes :” Considerable portions of his word have been regularly read ; and you have attended on the ministrations of those whose business it is to expound and apply them : You exult in the pri-

vileges of which you are possessed, and think yourselves sufficiently prepared for all the varieties of condition, which in your progress through life, it may be your lot to experience.

But, when you come to extend your intercourse with the world, your principles as well as your virtue, may be exposed to dangers of which at present you are not aware, and which hitherto you are ignorant of the means of escaping. You think your principles are fixed, merely because they have never been attacked; and you are fond of them, because you have not felt in all their force, those desires which they forbid you to gratify. But if you mingle without caution with the men of the world; if you “come into their counsel,” and unite in their pursuits, you may expect in time to adopt their maxims, and to abandon your own. You are “men of like passions with others:” Your sensual appetites may be inflamed; and when gratification is within your reach, you will be eager to partake of it. Seasons of indulgence will be succeeded by seasons of reflection. The voice of conscience will condemn your iniquity, and warn you to anticipate the just judgment of God. But those into whose company you have fallen,

seem not, in the intervals of enjoyment, to be distracted, as you are with shame, and compunction, and terror. You wish to be informed of the cause of their tranquillity; and you hear, at first, perhaps with horror, afterwards with patience, and at length with approbation, that they consider religion as a delusion, to which the timorous and feeble-minded are subject, as the craft by which priests have their wealth, or, as an engine by which politicians are assisted in governing the world. It hath become your interest to be convinced, that you formerly erred: and such is the power of the affections over the understanding; such is the "deceitfulness of sin, and of the heart;" that, what we wish, we readily believe. "Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light; neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." Those ungodly men, in whose counsel you have walked," and in whose way you have stood," place themselves "in the chair of the scornful;" and you are willing to regard the ribaldry they utter, as oracles of wisdom. Pride, which is the vice of a depraved understanding, co-operates with those loose desires which mark a depraved wi'l, in

completing your conversion to the cause of infidelity. A fondness for singularity of opinion, is contracted. It is thought beneath the dignity of a cultivated mind to assent to doctrines which the illiterate multitude receive. Tenets, which have obtained among the wise and the good, through a succession of ages, give place to those on which fashion confers a temporary lustre. Because the evidences of the gospel overpower not the freedom of your minds, or because they have been withstood by men, whose talents you have learned to over-rate, you hold them to be insufficient to produce conviction. That meekness and forbearance, which the followers of Jesus are required to exercise, you suppose characteristics of an abject mind; and those salutary restraints which are imposed on them, you pronounce incompatible with the enjoyment of life. Cavils, which in the assembly of the unrighteous you have been accustomed to hear, you learn to repeat; and a desire to receive a portion of applause, animates your endeavours to turn into ridicule, those sublime mysteries, which you ought to revere. By your wilful rejection of the truth, a just God is at length provoked to deprive you of the means of information, or to

withhold his blessing, without which they must be used in vain. "Hearing ye hear, and do not understand. Seeing ye see, and do not perceive." Strong delusions are sent, and "ye believe a lie. Through ignorance and blindness of heart," ye have become, not the subjects only, but also the ministers, of the kingdom of darkness.

Widely different is the state, in which your sentiments and opinions may be expected to remain, if, like David, you are connected with those who "fear God, and keep his precepts." The sincerity and strength of your faith, may indeed be tried. You may lose something of that ardour and zeal which you felt, when your mind was first enlightened by the knowledge of the truth. You may investigate the proofs of the gospel, without feeling as formerly, their power of conviction. You may have doubts of the soundness or value of principles, which do not always restrain the violence of passion, and prevent discontent and dejection, when providence assumes a threatening aspect. The father of lights may hide his countenance, and you may be troubled.

In such a state of mind, it is an unspeakable advantage to be a companion of those in whom ye may put confidence, and from whose knowledge and experience, ye may derive improvement and relief. " Their conversation is seasoned with salt, and ministers grace to the hearers." It will recal important truths, which may have escaped your recollection. They who have felt their force, can bear witness to the sufficiency of the proofs of the gospel. They who have been delivered from doubt and apprehension, are best able to testify the power and willingness of the Almighty to deliver you, and to render your trials subservient to your growth in grace. They who understand most thoroughly, can best explain the nature, and the consistency of the doctrine of God : and they who have given it the most cordial reception, prove by their temper and lives, no less than by their conversation, its truth and excellence. The luxuriance of the fruit is the best evidence of the goodness of the tree on which it grows. When pure streams are observed to flow, we conclude, that they flow not from a polluted fountain. In like manner, when men act suitably to the principles by which they profess to be governed, in-

fidelity is driven from its strong hold, and “ wisdom is justified of her children.”

But here, it may be inquired, “ among the numerous professors of religion, who are they who may be considered as having obtained the knowledge of it, and in whose company the young and inexperienced, the ignorant and credulous, the timorous and doubtful, may expect to be safe.” This question is of high importance. They who are in quest of truth, must “ not believe every spirit,” nor admit the sincerity of every profession. “ The seat of Moses” hath been occupied by men, who have “ taught for doctrines, commandments” of their own. The church of Christ hath been torn by heresy and faction : But it is not hence to be inferred, that we have just cause to give way to scepticism or to bigotry ; to despair of receiving from any, a satisfactory answer, when we ask what is truth ; or that having found it among christians of a particular denomination, we may hold all the rest to be impostors or enthusiasts ; to be frantic visionaries, whose weakness we may deride, or malicious enemies, whose right to the exercise of private judgement, and to the comforts of society, we may dispute or abridge. The

text furnishes an unequivocal mark, by which those may be known, with whom we may venture to associate : and at the same time, it discovers the charitable spirit which the Psalmist breathed. It was not by the outward profession, but by the real characters of men, that he was determined in his choice of companions. He was in habits of friendship with “ all them that feared “ God,” and whose religious affections were discovered by their influence on their conduct in life. In like manner, we ought to love all them that “ love the Lord Jesus in sincerity ;” and we may charitably suppose, that all do so, “ who keep “ his precepts,” although in some respects they may differ in their opinions of things, which fall not under the description of “ the weightier “ matters of the law.”

Secondly, A proper choice of company may be recommended, from the consideration of its influence on our conduct.

Man is fitted, not for study and contemplation only, but also for business and affairs. He is capable of removing from place to place, of defending himself from danger, of collecting the spontaneous productions of the earth, and

of contributing by his industry, to increase the resources on which providence hath appointed him to depend.

His active powers render him a fit subject of moral and religious discipline. He is able to perceive a distinction between good and evil, and in some measure, to pursue the one, and avoid the other. The law of the Lord was originally "written on his heart," and a voice from heaven hath been heard saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." True religion is of a partial nature: There is a "conversation that becometh the gospel." There are "good works," which those who have "believed in God" must be "careful to maintain. He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

Nor is God "a hard master, reaping where he hath not sown, and gathering where he hath not strowed." If he call us to exertions, for which our powers are too feeble, he is ready "to endue us with power from on high." If our hearts have been "set in us to do evil," his grace is sufficient to change and renew them. If we have been in rebellion against our invisible

sovereign, he is able to subdue us to himself, and to make us a willing, as well as an obedient people "in the day of his power."

Accustomed perhaps to meditate on the law of the Lord, you have perceived it to be "holy, just, and good." Ignorant as yet of your own frailty, and of the strength of temptation, you think it impossible that you shall ever be led away by the error of the wicked. Those indulgences you consider as too dearly purchased, for which they forego the approbation of conscience, and the approbation of God. In a sober hour, you come to the resolution that "whatever others do, you will serve the Lord,"—that whatever difficulties or trials you may experience, you will "hold fast your integrity and not let it go." Your resolution is noble; but beware, lest your imprudence bring you into circumstances in which it will be impossible to carry it into effect.

"Be not deceived: Evil communications corrupt good manners." It is dangerous to form an intimacy with those who despise the laws which ye wish to obey, and are addicted to the practices from which you ought to abstain. The heinousness of sin will appear to be diminished, if you have familiarized yourselves with the sight

of it. The danger of committing it you will be apt to forget, when you behold the prosperity of wicked men, and observe no visible token of the displeasure of him whom they dishonour, and even set at defiance. By degrees, you will venture to copy their manners. Your first deviations from duty, they will encourage you to consider as small, by representing them as natural, by appealing to their own experience of their safety, by turning into ridicule the principles by which you have been restrained, or by encouraging you to hope, that your repentance, however late, will be regarded by a merciful God, as a sufficient atonement. The pleasures of which you have partaken, you will be eager to partake of again ; and your seducers exulting in the prospect of rendering you altogether such as themselves, will hurry you to scenes of festivity and riot ; nor will they incline at any time, to leave you alone, lest the convictions they have taught you to stifle, recover power to disappoint them of the triumph with which they expected to contemplate your fall. “ In your own eyes you will “ flatter yourselves till your iniquity be found hateful.” Having passed the limits within which your virtue was safe, the resolutions to which

you trusted for its preservation, prove " like the
 " morning cloud, or the early dew which passeth
 " away." The foundations of the innocence of
 paradise began to be undermined, when the mo-
 ther of our race entered into conversation with
 the tempter. Lot was in danger while he re-
 mained in Sodom. The enemy who makes an
 open and unprovoked assault, we may hope
 for courage or conduct to repel; but we must
 not expect to come off unhurt, if we rush unarm-
 ed on the thick bosses of his buckler. When
 the noise of many waters is heard, it is certainly
 wiser to retire from the banks they are beginning
 to pass, than to suppose that our strength is suf-
 ficient to resist the impetuosity of the stream.

But again, if bad company be so pernicious to
 those who, before they entered it, had something
 within to restrain them, must not its operation
 be more speedy and successful on those who have
 not had the benefit of a good education, and
 who scarcely have heard of a God, of a Saviour,
 or of a Judgment to come. It is the misfortune
 of some, to have lost their parents, at that period
 of life when they stood most in need of their
 care and protection: and many are cursed with
 parents too ignorant, too negligent, or too un-

principled, to form their manners, and to cultivate their minds. If such persons are not allowed to be perfectly idle, their attention is confined to the methods of making or of spending money, of acquiring or of preserving independence, of coming forward from the obscurity of a private station, or of shining in that to which they have already been raised. Sent abroad into the world, without any just impressions of the origin and end of man, they must soon be ensnared by those who lie in wait to deceive. The conduct of any with whom they happen to associate, they will naturally make the rule and model of their own.

The principle of imitation is in man peculiarly strong: and hence it hath with truth been observed, that "example is more powerful than precept." But if bad example be able to counteract even good precept, what must be its effects on those to whom precept has never been delivered? It is "in the night, when the husband-man slumbereth, that the enemy soweth tares" among the rising wheat. It is "the field of the slothful," and the "vineyard of the man void of understanding, which are all grown over with thorns and nettles." Those who do business in the great waters, may by skill in their pro-

feſſion, and attention to its duties, be preſerved from the winds and the waves; but if without a helm or a pilot, they preſume to embark, they muſt ſoon be ſwallowed up by the deep, or be daſhed to pieces on rocks.

But, on the contrary, while the companions of ungodly men are in danger of exhibiting in their own behaviour, all the deceivableneſs of unrighteouſneſs, thoſe whoſe companions are choſen among the ſervants of the Lord, make uſe of a powerful mean of preſerving and improving their virtue. It is no inconfiderable attainment to have courage to avow and to act upon our principles. Many, and the young in particular, are afraid of being thought ſingular. Though convinced of the truth of religion, and accuſtomed to revere “the beauty of holineſs,” they are not eaſily brought to profeſs them openly, when they happen to be unfashionable. But from the converſation of good men, they learn that it is a ſmall matter to be judged of man’s judgment; and the example which they have occaſion daily to obſerve, rouses a virtuous emulation, and points out the path which conducts them to glory. That which others are obſerved to perform, they ceaſe to regard as impracticable. That

for which many have suffered, and for which many have even dared to die; they cannot account dishonourable or base. Their intimacy with the righteous, leads to an acquaintance with the consolations which are theirs, and with the animating hopes which they entertain. To be religious, comes to be viewed, not as a duty only, but also as the privilege of man; not as the source of dejection and melancholy, but as a source of joy unspeakable, and full of glory.

The assaults of temptation must be felt by all; and they will frequently be complied with, while infirmity and corruption remain. But a wise and faithful friend, by reproof in the spirit of meekness, will awaken contrition when you have gone astray; and by recounting his own experience of the grace of God, he will prevent you, in a desponding hour, from sorrowing even as others who have no hope. Even the errors and miscarriages of the people of God minister improvement. So affecting a display of human frailty, is a lesson of moderation and diffidence, and a memorial of the necessity of supernatural aid. He who thought that he stood, is admonished to take heed lest he fall: and perceiving how much persons wiser and better than himself,

require a righteousness and strength superior to their own, he puts away all confident boasting; he implores with fervour, and acknowledges with gratitude, the presence and the influences of that spirit who is "able to guide him into all truth, "to sanctify him wholly, and to seal his soul to "the day of redemption."

Thirdly, A proper choice of company may be recommended by the consideration of its influence on our enjoyment.

Religion doth not deem her votaries to spend their lives in gloom and melancholy. On the contrary, she corrects those false judgments of man and of things, which are incompatible with happiness; and conducts them to the sources from which it flows pure and unmingled. When the bodily appetites and the affections of the heart do not become inordinate, it is the dictate of nature and of God, that we may indulge them. It were absurd to suppose, that the face of nature is gay; that the seasons revolve; and that the springing of the earth is blessed, for no other purpose, than to furnish the wicked with the pleasures of variety, and the means of ruining themselves and dishonouring the bountiful giver

of all. Of the blessings of providence the righteous may partake: With the exhortation addressed to them to "rejoice evermore", it is their duty to comply.

Of the joys of which we are susceptible, some are of a solitary, and some of a social nature. "The good man is satisfied from himself." His happiness arises, in a great measure, from the testimony of his conscience; from the evidence which he hath in himself that he is at peace with God; from the exercise of his best faculties and affections in study and devotion, and from the prospect of the reward reserved for him in heaven.

But none are totally independent on the world; nor is it consistent with our duty to our brethren or to ourselves, that we retire from society. Man is irresistibly prompted to associate with man. The young in particular are capable of strong attachments. Unacquainted with the world, they have not become suspicious. They pour forth their hearts without reserve: nor are they aware of the motives, by which many are led to court their favour. Looking only on the outward appearance, they know not that a smiling countenance is often connected with

an aching or with a treacherous heart. Reposing unlimited confidence in those who lie in wait to obtain it, they are easily persuaded, that complete satisfaction is to be found in the scenes of dissipation and riot, which so many are observed to frequent.

The gratification of every natural desire is no doubt attended with pleasure. “ Truly
 “ the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is
 “ for the eyes to behold the sun. But if a
 “ man live many days, and rejoice in them all,
 “ yet let him remember the days of darkness,
 “ for they shall be many.” The pursuits in
 which dissolute companions may lead you to
 engage, are not suited to the dignity of rational
 and immortal beings ; and the immediate, as
 well as the more remote consequences of them,
 are sufficiently important to rouse and alarm
 you. “ There is a way that seemeth right to a
 “ man ; but the end thereof are the ways of
 “ death. Even in laughter the heart is sorrow-
 “ ful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.
 Cravings are felt, which the abundance of
 corn and wine is not to remove. “ As the
 “ crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the
 “ laughter of fools.” A blaze is beheld, which

is soon to be extinguished : A tumultuous noise is heard, which is soon to be succeeded by a silence solemn and awful. Habits of intemperance will not fail to ruin your peace and comfort. “ Who hath woe ? who hath sorrow ? who hath contentions ? who hath babblings ? who hath wounds without cause ? who hath redness of eyes ? They that tarry long at the wine ; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou on the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.” E’erwhile thy strength was firm, and thy mind was calm and serene. But behold, thy bodily constitution begins to be impaired ; and languor and dejection seize thy spirits. Before thou hast lived half thy days, thou art loaded with the infirmities and the helplessness of old age. In vain is the sumptuous banquet now prepared, for the appetite is gone which should have made thee to relish it. “ The full soul loatheth an honey-comb ; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.” For thee in vain are the beauties of nature displayed ; for even the rays of the sun are hateful to thine

eyes; nor art thou susceptible of that sentimental enjoyment which belongs to the devout, when they seek and discover the Creator in the midst of his works, and adore him for the protection and the comforts he bestows.

Peradventure, in a solitary hour, you recollect the means and the steps by which you have been degraded; and your conscience inflicts, or leads you to anticipate the doom you deserve. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" The wounds of the spirit it is your portion to feel; and who can tell if you have not allowed the period to pass, in which you might have known, that there is "balm in Giliad, and a physician there." If you have not wasted your substance, your former companions will assemble around you, and will seek to convince you, that by a repetition of the crimes of which you have been guilty, you may escape the anguish, which the remembrance of them serves to awaken. Besides, habits are formed, the influence of which is not to be withstood. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."

Still you continue to incur expences, which at length you begin to want the means of defraying. Your fortune hath been inconsiderately squandered away. With a debilitated body, and an effeminate mind, you are no longer capable of application to business. Out of the abundance which they may yet possess, none of these, whom you have called your friends, will be disposed to minister to your necessities. The funds, which charity appropriates to the relief of the honest poor, belong not to you, nor indeed will your pride permit you to institute a claim. "You cannot dig; to beg you are ashamed. Poverty hath come as one that travelleth, and want as an armed man."

In an evil hour, you have recourse to some desperate expedient to obtain the means of present support, to prop your sinking credit, to satisfy, or at least to silence those whom your extravagance hath deprived of the reward of their industry, and whose patience your prevarication and falsehood have exhausted. "Men void of understanding" are persuaded to become surety for debts, which you are conscious they must be left to discharge. At the gaming table you lay snares for the young and incautious;

or taken in the snare you had prepared for others, you try by forgery to make up the losses you have sustained. Peradventure, some whose circumstances are as desperate as your's, suggest the idea of entering by stealth into the storehouse of your neighbour, or of making an open assault on the unsuspecting and unarmed traveller. The injured sufferer makes his complaint, or the innocent blood you have shed " calleth aloud to heaven for vengeance." The ministers of justice perform their duty ; and you are left amid the solitude and gloom of a prison, to feel the miseries of shame and remorse, and to be shaken with the terrors which attend the anticipation of a solemn trial, of a public execution, and of an immediate appearance at the tribunal of God. And in the moments of returning sensibility and reflection, the remembrance of relations and friends, whom your behaviour hath involved in distress and infamy, will serve to enhance the severity of your punishment. " The father of a fool hath no joy ; and " a foolish son is a bitterness to her that bare " him." His parents go about mourning because of him all the days of their lives ; till, be-

reaved at length of every earthly comfort, their
 “ grey hairs descend in sorrow to the grave.”

You hear of the ruin you have occasioned, yet still your heart clings to life, and you long to be delivered from your dreary mansion. You flatter yourselves with the hope of deliverance, because the night was the season which you chose for the perpetration of your crimes, or because your prosecutors have not discovered all the circumstances which might serve to establish your guilt. But beware, lest the wretch who had seduced, be the first to betray you. He will be ready to sacrifice your life to the preservation of his own; and a policy, with which it is consistent, that all confidence among those who are the pests of society should be destroyed, will admit their testimony in evidence against you. The judge will award your doom, and deliver you over to the executioner. And who can tell if a just God, whom through life you have dishonoured, will now give you repentance, and save you from “ the wrath to come. Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself; and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.

“ He shall die without instruction, and in the
“ greatness of his folly he shall go astray.”

But, on the other hand, in the company of those who “ fear God and keep his precepts,” your happiness will be promoted, whatever may be your rank and situation in life. The best affections of your hearts will be called forth into exercise ; and an entertainment will be furnished, of which you may partake without degrading your character, and on which you may afterwards reflect without pain and remorse. The righteous find a time for every thing under the sun. In the day of prosperity they are joyful. They can unbend themselves occasionally from more important pursuits, to promote and to enjoy the circulation of festivity and mirth. Nor are they to be regarded as gloomy and dejected, though their laughter is not of a boisterous and intemperate kind. From the exercise of the rational faculties, from sober chastened manly discourse, from the overflowings of virtuous sensibility, from the tear of sympathy, which there may be occasion to shed, and from acts of adoration and social worship, in which the righteous will frequently engage, enjoyments arise, which those who have had expe-

rience of them, are able to appretiate, and which they would not exchange for all that the wicked pretend to derive from the most unbounded indulgence of sense and appetite.

Again, if Providence assign to you a change of condition; if your fortune or your health hath been impaired; if some honourable scheme hath failed of success, or some tender connection hath been unexpectedly dissolved; you may be assured, that next to the friendship of God, the friendship of his people will prove a source of support and consolation. It is no inconsiderable comfort to have one to whom the full heart may pour forth its complaint. The detail of it, to a faithful and compassionate friend, serves of itself to diminish the bitterness of woe. Nor is it merely for the purpose of hearing your lamentation, or of indulging that pensive tenderness, which even worldly men are not always averse to indulge, that persons of this description are led to visit you, when your house hath become "the house of mourning." The distress which they witness, they desire to remove, or to alleviate. "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." It is in such a season that a friend is most needed, and that his value

is best known. It is by the conduct which in such a season they maintain, that the righteous vindicate their claim to the character of brethren. While their hearts overflow with compassion, they withhold no aid or relief, which they are blessed with the means of affording, And while they give liberally those things which are needful to the body, they, at the same time, direct their attention to the state of your temper and mind. If your distress hath been occasioned by your own imprudence or misconduct, they admonish you in the spirit of meekness, to profit by the correction of your Father's hand. If you are in danger of forgetting, they will remind you of the "patience" in which you ought to "possess your souls," and of the sources of rejoicing, which even in tribulation you may explore. They whose "effectual fervent prayer availeth much," make intercession in your behalf at the throne of grace; and they who have "felt the powers of "the world to come," assist you to anticipate the period, when "all tears shall be wiped "from your eyes," and when the remembrance of the perils and hardships of your warfare,

shall serve to enhance the glory of your triumph.

This leads me, in the last place, to observe, that the society of good men is recommended, by its tendency to prepare us for heaven. The happiness of heaven is of a social nature. There is an innumerable company before the throne of God. "A multitude collected out of all tongues, "and kindreds, and nations, and people," cease not day or night to engage in exercises the most sublime, and to "rejoice with joy unspeakable." And surely it is meet, that we associate with those, with whose "spirits" when "made "perfect," we hope to form an indissoluble union. It is thus that we may expect to acquire, or to heighten a relish for the exercises and enjoyments of the temple above. By mutual converse on the things of God, we shall prepare each other for a state, in which clearer discoveries of these things will be made, in which we shall "behold his face in righteousness," and "know even as also we are known." By joining in the "melody" which "is in the "dwelling of the righteous," by "provoking "one another to love and good works," by

celebrating the grace by which we are saved, and wherein we stand, we shall gradually become meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, and for ascribing, throughout all ages, " blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, " to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to " the Lamb that was slain."

Thus, have I endeavoured to point out the importance of a proper choice of company, by considering its influence on our *principles*, on our conduct, and on our *enjoyment*. The reasoning made use of is certainly plain ; and if we look abroad into the world, we shall find it supported by fact and experience. In every place, men may find opportunities of corrupting or of improving one another: But it is more especially in a populous city, that the corrupters of youth abound ; and that those who are willing to comply with temptation, may easily find the means of indulgence. Among you religion hath been observed to decline, and the progress of infidelity and vice hath been sufficiently rapid to excite apprehension and alarm in every serious mind. To counteract this growing evil, is a work in which men of every station, ought to combine their

talents and their influence. Parents and teachers of youth are solemnly bound to season their minds with wholesome instruction, and to assist and direct them in the connections, and in the habits which they form. They on whom the administration of public affairs hath devolved, ought to approve themselves terrors to evil doers, the patrons of goodness, and of good men, the "nursing fathers of the church of Christ." His own ministers ought not to be "ashamed of him, or of any of his words," but to "declare the whole counsel of God, to testify the gospel of his grace," to point out the danger of neglecting this "great salvation," and to illustrate and apply those exceeding great and precious promises, by which, amid all the trials, and afflictions, and changes, which mortals know, consolation and relief are afforded to the mind.

Even they who as individuals are unable to be extensively useful, may, by forming associations, and taking counsel together, be successful instruments in the hand of God, of promoting his glory, and the best interests of men. An eminent proof of this is furnished by the transactions of those, in compliance with whose

request I have at this time the honour to address you. THE SOCIETY IN SCOTLAND FOR PROMOTING RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE POOR, hath now subsisted for several years ; and by the public at large, as well as by its members themselves, their pious and benevolent labours may be reviewed with approbation, and with gratitude to heaven. The sources of information have been opened to many, who, by the peculiarity of their circumstances, were formerly prevented from exploring them. Religious books have been distributed to a considerable extent : Catechetical exercises have been instituted ; and at present, not fewer than a thousand persons attend on the evening of every Lord's day, to be instructed in the principles and duties of the gospel. Ministers have lent their assistance to so good a work, and have studied to accommodate their discourses to the capacities and situation of those, who have assembled to hear them.

Go on, my friends, to fulfil your "labour of love ;" nor doubt that your country will bestow the applause you deserve. But ye desire "not the praise of men : " Your ambition is, to obtain that which cometh from God ; and

your " expectation shall not be cut off." Those that " honour him, he delights to honour. He will give you a joy with which a stranger doth not intermeddle ; and for you is reserved an everlasting inheritance.

Lastly, Let us who belong not to this respectable society, seek to be possessed of a portion of its spirit, and let us contribute to its support and success. Hitherto it hath been much indebted to the voluntary offerings of a generous Public ; and it must encourage the continuance of your liberality, that what you have already bestowed hath been so well applied. If the blessing of heaven hath prospered your industry, sanctify your gains by an offering to the Lord. Let your hearts devise liberal things. Have compassion on them that are ready to perish for lack of knowledge. Your interposition may be the instrument of " saving " their souls from death, and of hiding a multitude of sins." Their prayers for you, will rise as incense to the throne of God ; and though they " cannot recompense you, you " shall be recompensed in the resurrection of " the just." Finally, Let us unite in fervent sup-

plication to that Being without whom " Paul
 " may plant and Apollos may water" in vain.
 If in the name of his Son, we present our ad-
 dresses at his throne of grace, he will assuredly
 approve himself the Guardian and the God of
 our Zion. " He will not forsake the work of
 " his own hands. There will be a seed to serve
 " him while the sun and the moon endure."
 And when the revolutions of nature shall cease,
 you shall mingle with those who having been
 " wife," and having " turned many to right-
 " eousness, shall shine like the sun in the firma-
 " ment, and like the stars, for ever and ever."



APPENDIX,

CONTAINING

A SUMMARY ACCOUNT

OF

*The SOCIETY in SCOTLAND for promoting RELIGIOUS
KNOWLEDGE among the POOR.*

THE alarming decline of Religion, and the rapid progress of immorality, particularly among the lower classes of men, some years ago suggested to a number of persons in this city, the idea of making an attempt to counteract this growing evil. Convinced that it was chiefly owing to the want of religious impressions on the minds of the people, and that this in a great measure arose from their gross and deplorable ignorance, the primary aim was to furnish them with such means of instruction as were best fitted to bring them to a just acquaintance with the truths of Christianity. For this purpose they formed themselves into "A Society for promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor;" and adopted the plan which seemed most likely to accomplish that object.

They began with distributing a number of Bibles, Testaments, and Religious Treatises, calculated to convey to the uninformed a clear and practical knowledge of the doctrines and duties of the gospel. To enforce these instructions, they afterwards proceeded, as their funds would permit, to institute Catechetical Exercises, in which, every Lord's Day evening, all who should choose to attend might have an opportunity of hearing the Truths of Religion explained and applied. In the ap-

pointment of these the Society have proceeded a considerable length, having already on their establishment no less than sixteen Catechists, as appears from the annexed list. These are attended by nearly a thousand persons, young and old; and the reports which are occasionally laid before the Society by the Catechists, give the most pleasing and favourable accounts of the progress and improvement in Religious Knowledge, of the young persons under their care.

These measures, even in the limited extent to which the Society have been enabled to carry them, they have the satisfaction to think, have been attended with considerable success. Besides distributing as gifts, many Catechisms of different kinds, and Religious Treatises, as well as Bibles and Testaments, they have collected a small library of useful and practical Religious Books, which are lent out to those who are disposed to read them, but whose circumstances put it out of their power to purchase them. They have also reprinted a number of Religious Treatises, which they sell nearly at prime cost to those who may be inclined to distribute them, *gratis*. Every subscriber is, by the Rules of the Society, entitled in rotation to a nomination of Books for private distribution, equal to three-fourths of his annual subscription; and the society do also, on proper application, give Books to be distributed by persons in whom they can have confidence as to the faithful and proper distribution.

Upon the institution of the Society, the Ministers in this city and neighbourhood very readily gave it their countenance and support; and a number of them being applied to, cheerfully agreed to second their intentions, by preaching Sermons adapted to the design of the Society, once in every quarter of the year, in one of the churches of Edinburgh. The money collected upon these occasions is applied principally towards defraying the expences of the schools established by the Society.

The Society acknowledge, with gratitude, the countenance and support they have hitherto received from the Public, and which has enabled them to carry their designs so far into execution. A donation of 20 l. Sterling, lately received from a person unknown, demands their particular acknowledgements; and the Society gladly embrace this opportunity of conveying their thanks for so liberal a donation, and of assuring that person, that the same shall be most faithfully applied. The Society must, at the same time, pay a tribute of gratitude and respect to the memories of the late Mr. Thomas Ruthven writer in Edinburgh, and Mrs. Robb of this place, Benefactors to the Society: The first of whom bequeathed 50 l. Sterling to the Society, payable at Whitsunday 1793; and by the will of the latter, they are to receive 10 l. Sterling. The Society having, however, no fixed and permanent fund for defraying the expences of the institution, except the annual subscription of the Members, and the Collections at the Quarterly Sermons, it is evident they must constantly depend upon the aid of the humane and benevolent. They are unwilling to importune the Public; but leave it with them to judge of the propriety of supporting an institution calculated to promote the present welfare and future happiness of their fellow-creatures.

Donations are received by

Mess. Mansfield, Ramsay and Company, Bankers.
 Mess. Bertram, Gardner and Company, Bankers.
 William Galloway, Esq. Merchant.
 William Creech, Esq. Bookseller.
 Mr. Daniel Miller Merchant, Cannongate.
 Mr. Alexander Pitcairn, Insurance Broker.
 Mr. John Moncrief, Apothecary.
 Mr. Horatius Cannan, Clerk to the Signet.

*LIST of CATECHISTS, and of their Stations, in the Em-
ployment of the SOCIETY for promoting RELIGIOUS
KNOWLEDGE among the POOR, for the Year 1791,*

<i>Catechists Names.</i>	<i>Stations.</i>	<i>Dates of their Appointment.</i>
1. David Niven	Edinburgh	1st Aug. 1786
2. Robert M'Farlane	Erse Catechist, Edin.	7th Jan. 1787
3. Robert Scott	Portsburgh	17th April 1787
4. James Stewart	South Leith	30th Jan. 1788
5. John Cuming	Canongate	1st April 1788
6. Robert Burton	North Leith	1st April 1788
7. Robert Skethway	Kirkwall in Orkney	27th Aug. 1788
8. Hector Cameron	Gilmerton	1st May 1789
9. James Keith	Loanhead	1st May 1789
10. William Philips	Neither Libberton	1st May 1789
11. John Wilson	Edinburgh	1st Oct. 1789
12. Josiah Moir	Canonmills	2d Nov. 1789
12. William Anderfen	Perth	2d Nov. 1789
14. Andrew Smith	Wick	31st May 1790
15. William Isbister	Stromness	1st Nov. 1790
16. Thomas Murray	Abbeyhill	1st Nov. 1790

The Committee have, during the course of last year, only established two new Catechetical Schools, the one at Stromness, the other at Abbeyhill, so that the Society's establishment, with these additions, remains pretty nearly the same as last year, except that the school at Greenock, has been struck off their establishment, because no encouragement could be obtained for it, though repeatedly applied for. Each Catechist is allowed an annual salary of 5 l. 5 s. except the Catechist at Nether Libberton, who has only a half salary. It is proper to observe, that the inhabitants of Loanhead pay 4 l. Sterling annually towards the expence of the school at that place; and that the whole of the expence of the school at Perth is now undertaken by the Kirk-Session. But notwithstanding of these, the Society annually pay the sum of 72 l. 2 s. 6 d. Sterling in salaries to Catechists alone, independent of the expence of school-houses, books, door-keepers, and coal and candle.

*PRESIDENT, OFFICE-BEARERS, and COMMITTEE of
MANAGERS for the Year 1791.*

Right Hon. DAVID EARL of LEVEN and MEL-
VILLE, *President of the Society.*

WILLIAM GALLOWAY, Esq. Merchant in Edinburgh,
Vice-President.

Mr. HORATIUS CANNAN Clerk to the Signet, *Secretary.*

Mr. JOHN MONCRIEF, Apothecary, *Treasurer.*

Mr. JOHN PITCAIRN, Merchant, *Librarian.*

Committee of Managers.

Sir John Withart Belsches, Baronet, *President of the
Committee.*

Alexander Alifon, Esq. Depute Cashier of Excise.

John Dickson, Esq. Advocate.

William Ker, Esq. Secretary to the Post Office.

Mr. John Tawse, Writer.

Mr. Alexander Bonar, Banker.

Mr. Alexander Pitcairn, Insurance Broker.

Mr. Robert Wilson, Teacher.

Mr. William Pattison

Mr. David Thomson

Mr. James Scott

Mr. Thomas Milne

} Merchants in Edinburgh.

It is requested of those who intend to favour the So-
ciety with Donations or Legacies, that they will express
particularly, "The Society in Scotland for promoting
Religious Knowledge among the Poor."

*LIST of BOOKS in the Society's Library, at Mr.
DAVID NIVEN's, Baron Grant's Close, Edinburgh,
with the Prices at which they will be sold to any
who mean to distribute them gratis.*

				PRICES.		
				L.	s.	d.
Common Bibles, bound,	-	-	-	7	0	0
Testaments, with Psalms, bound,	-	-	-	10	0	0
* Mason's Select Remains, stitched,	-	-	-	4	0	0
* A Present to Servants, stitched,	-	-	-	2	0	0
* Assembly's Shorter Catechisms, per dozen,	-	-	-	4	0	0
* Ditto, with Scripture Proofs, per dozen,	-	-	-	8	0	0
* Watt's Catechisms, stitched,	-	-	-	1	0	0
Mair's Catechism, stitched,	-	-	-	2	0	0
* The Assembly's Catechism, explained by David Some,	-	-	-	1	0	0
* Willison's Mother's Catechisms, stitched, per dozen,	-	-	-	9	0	0
Vincent's Catechisms, bound,	-	-	-	8	0	0
Oliphant's Sacramental Catechisms, stitched,	-	-	-	1	0	0
Brown's Catechisms, stitched,	-	-	-	1	0	0
Janeway's Token for Children, stitched,	-	-	-	2	0	0
* Reynold's Compassionate Address to the Christian World, stitched,	-	-	-	2	0	0
* Doddridge on Family Religion, stitched,	-	-	-	1	0	0
—— Rife and Progress of Religion, bound,	-	-	-	1	0	0
* Henry on Communion with God, stitched,	-	-	-	4	0	0
* Pleasantry of Religion, stitched,	-	-	-	4	0	0
* Guthrie's Saving Interest in Christ, bound,	-	-	-	8	0	0
* Earl on the Lord's Supper, bound,	-	-	-	6	0	0
Ditto, stitched,	-	-	-	4	0	0
* Sabbath Breaker's Monitor, stitched,	-	-	-	1	0	0
* Baxter's Call to the Unconverted, stitched,	-	-	-	3	0	0
* The Religious Tradesman, stitched,	-	-	-	4	0	0
Ditto, bound,	-	-	-	6	0	0
Allein's Allarm, in Gaelic, bound,	-	-	-	6	0	0
* ——— in English, bound,	-	-	-	7	0	0
* Three Dialogues between a Minister and one of his Hear- ers on the true Principles of Religion, per dozen,	-	-	-	9	0	0
Boston's Fourfold State, bound,	-	-	-	1	0	0
Marshall on Sanctification, bound,	-	-	-	9	0	0
* Exercises against Lying, per dozen,	-	-	-	4	0	0
* The Great Evil of Profane Cursing and Swearing, per dozen,	-	-	-	4	0	0
* The Great Duty of Believing on the Son of God, per dozen,	-	-	-	0	1	0
* The Great Evil of the Sin of Drunkenness, per dozen,	-	-	-	4	0	0

N. B. Those marked thus * have been reprinted at the Society's Expence.

